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Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 24.

We have good news this month for anyone worried about Alzheimer's disease: both blueberries and a nutrient drink called Souvenaid have shown beneficial effects in patients with mild memory problems. Other interesting findings reported this month were that multivitamins may cut lung cancer risk in smokers and vitamin E may help brain function after a stroke. Omega-3 fatty acids have again shown benefits, this time for non-alcoholic liver disease and, when combined with glucosamine, for joint health.

I hope you enjoy the interesting variety of studies highlighted this month, and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Kind Regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

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Red yeast rice supplement reduces cholesterol

The facts:

- 62 patients with high blood fats who couldn't take prescribed statins because of muscle pain were given placebo or a red yeast rice supplement (equivalent to lovastatin 6mg) for 24 weeks.
- The red yeast rice supplement significantly reduced total and LDL cholesterol levels compared with placebo.
- Two people in the supplement group and 1 person in the placebo group stopped treatment because of intolerable muscle pain.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Statins are a group of drugs that reduce cholesterol and they are wonder-drugs – very effective and very safe. However, some people have side effects such as muscle pain and weakness, elevated liver enzymes, and gastrointestinal symptoms and so cannot take a statin. As we have seen in the Natural Health Review, a lot of the benefits of statins can be obtained from fish oil and this intriguing study suggests that a red yeast rice dietary supplement may be another alternative, as it contains low levels of a naturally occurring statin.

<http://www.annals.org/content/150/12/830.abstract>



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Yoga good for chronic lower back pain

The facts:

- 90 people with chronic lower back pain were assigned to yoga treatment (two 90-minute classes each week and 30 minutes of practice on other days) or no yoga for 12 weeks.
- Yoga significantly improved functional disability, pain levels and depression and reduced the need for painkillers.
- A 24-week period of yoga practice would give even better outcomes by improving posture and retraining muscles.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Almost all of us suffer from lower back pain at some stage in our lives, and for many people it is a serious ongoing complaint that can significantly interfere with their everyday activities. This study from the journal Spine found that yoga improved functional disability, pain intensity, and depression in adults with chronic lower back pain. Participants in the study practiced yoga for 30 minutes a day on days when there was no formal class. It was only a small study, but if you suffer from long-term low back pain yoga is well worth trying, and has many other proven health benefits as well

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/BRS.0b013e3181b22c0f>

Multivitamins may cut lung cancer risk in smokers

The facts:

- This study investigated whether certain micronutrients reduce gene methylation, a process linked to lung cancer risk.
- Over 1000 current and former smokers completed a dietary intake questionnaire and gave a sputum sample containing lung cells that were then assessed for methylation.
- Leafy green vegetables (at least 12 servings per month), folate intake (at least 750 mcg/day) and multivitamin supplements were associated with reduced gene methylation.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This National Cancer Institute study found that people who ate at least 12 servings of green leafy vegetables per month had a 17 per cent lower risk of changes in eight genes, changes that are associated with a higher risk of lung cancer. Much more work is needed and green leafy vegetables are of course recommended for everyone anyway. But the exciting aspect of this research is that it is one of the first to find a strong direct link between diet and a reduction in a mechanism that can lead to cancer.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1158/0008-5472.CAN-09-3410>

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Blueberries may boost memory in older adults



The facts:

- This study investigated the effects of daily consumption of wild blueberry juice (about 500ml) in 9 older adults with early memory changes.
- Learning and word list recall were significantly improved after 12 weeks, and depressive symptoms and glucose levels were reduced.
- Blueberries contain polyphenolic compounds that have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects.

Dr Shaun Holt:

The first human trial to assess the potential benefits of blueberries on brain function in older adults with increased risk for dementia and Alzheimer's had encouraging results: significant improvements in improved learning and word list recall and there were also indications that levels of depression were reduced. It is the flavonoids in the berries that are thought to be active. As is usually the case, bigger and better studies are needed to confirm the findings, but if you're worried about dementia and Alzheimer's then a daily dose of blueberries will not do any harm and may well do some good.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1021/jf9029332>

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Vitamin E may boost brain health after stroke

The facts:

- The neuroprotective effects of alpha-tocotrienol, a form of vitamin E, were examined in mice brain cells with artificially-induced stroke.
- Tocotrienol was found to stop an enzyme from releasing fatty acids responsible for brain cell death after stroke.
- Sources of relatively high levels of tocotrienols include palm oil, cereal grains and rice bran.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This animal study found that a form of vitamin E called tocotrienols may prevent nerve cell death in the brain following a stroke. As the population ages more and more people will suffer from strokes, one of the leading causes of death and, for survivors, disability. In a stroke, parts of the brain are starved of oxygen and die and so treatments such as this one, from the natural world, could potentially have massive benefits. It's early days for this treatment, but very exciting.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-4159.2009.06550.x>



Independent commentary by

Dr Shaun Holt,
BPharm (hons),
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Vitamin D levels not good enough

The facts:

- This study examined the relationship between sun exposure, skin pigmentation and vitamin D levels in 72 young adults.
- One of the main findings was that people with African ancestry who had low sun exposure had lower vitamin D levels than people with European ancestry who had high sun exposure.
- Recommended vitamin intakes, particular for people with darker skins, should be increased from current intakes of 200 IU/day to 2100–3100 IU/day all year-round.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Vitamin D is the subject of a huge amount of research for two reasons: it is becoming apparent both that it is very important for our health and also that almost all of us are deficient in it. We get vitamin D from our diets and also we make it ourselves when the skin is exposed to sunshine. This study found that the recommended amount that we should take in our diet or in the form of supplements should be around 5 times higher than the levels currently recommended.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3945/jn.109.115253>



Processed food could have role in depression, says study

The facts:

- The effects of a whole food diet (lots of vegetables, fruit and fish) on depression were compared with those of a processed food diet (lots of sweetened desserts, fried food, processed meat, refined grains and high-fat dairy products) in a large group of middle-aged people over a 5-year period.
- People with the highest intake of whole foods were less likely to report depression symptoms later on, whereas those who ate a lot of processed food had a higher risk of depression.
- The different effects of the 2 diets on depression were not related to other factors such as smoking, level of physical activity or weight.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Your granny was right ...food was better for you in the old days when it was less processed. Researchers studied diet data from nearly 3500 London civil servants over five years and assessed participants for symptoms of depression. Those with the highest intake of whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables and fish, were less likely to report depression symptoms and those who ate a lot of processed meat, chocolate, sweetened desserts, fried foods,



refined cereals and high fat dairy, were more likely to be depressed. Studies undertaken in this manner do have limitations, but it makes sense that processing foods and removing folate, omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants could affect brain chemistry and lead to depression.

<http://bjp.rcpsych.org/cgi/content/abstract/195/5/408>

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Review supports omega-3 for liver health

The facts:

- This study reviewed the use of omega-3 fatty acids in the treatment of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, a disorder affecting as many as 35% of adults worldwide.
- Omega-3 fatty acids reduced fatty liver and improved insulin sensitivity in animal studies; these findings were generally confirmed in humans although the studies were poorly designed.
- The potential use of omega-3 fatty acids in patients with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease needs to be investigated in well controlled clinical trials.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Is there any part of the body left that has not been shown to be helped by omega-3?! Fatty liver is usually symptomless but increases the risks of liver inflammation, and in some cases can lead to liver failure. The rates of fatty liver are rising along with obesity levels and in countries such as USA up to 50% of the population have a fatty liver. The researchers found that although studies undertaken so far were not of the highest quality, they do show that omega-3 fatty acids may improve liver health and there are good explanations as to how they might do this.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2036.2009.04230.x>

Research Review acknowledges the kind support of



PHARMACY GUILD OF NEW ZEALAND (INC)

Nutrient 'cocktail' appears to improve dementia symptoms

The facts:

- 225 patients with Alzheimer's disease were randomised to take the nutrient drink Souvenaid or a control drink once daily for 12 weeks.
- Patients with mild symptoms showed improvements in verbal memory after taking the nutrient drink for 12 weeks although other measures of Alzheimer's disease were unchanged.
- Souvenaid contains 3 fatty molecule precursors (uridine, choline and DHA) as well as B vitamins, phospholipids and antioxidants and may work by stimulating the growth of new brain connections.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Uridine, choline and the omega-3 fatty acid DHA, all of which are found in breast milk, are "building blocks" of the fatty molecules that make up brain cell membranes, which form synapses. Researchers speculated that if you can increase the number of synapses by enhancing their production, you might to some extent avoid that loss of cognitive ability that occurs in Alzheimer's patients. And this is what this study found: supplementation with a medical food substance for 12 weeks improved memory in patients with milder symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

[http://www.alzheimersanddementia.com/article/S1552-5260\(09\)02329-2/abstract](http://www.alzheimersanddementia.com/article/S1552-5260(09)02329-2/abstract)

Omega-3 plus glucosamine 'superior' for joint health

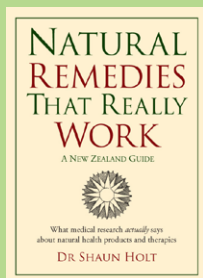
The facts:

- 177 patients with moderate-to-severe hip or knee osteoarthritis were given glucosamine 1500 mg/day alone or with omega-3 fatty acids for 26 weeks in a comparative study.
- Glucosamine plus omega-3 fatty acids reduced morning stiffness and hip or knee pain more than glucosamine alone, and more patients taking combined therapy (44% vs 32%) had pain scores reduced by at least 80%.
- Combining glucosamine with omega-3 fatty acids achieved better improvements in joint health than glucosamine alone.

Dr Shaun Holt:

We know that omega-3 fatty acids and glucosamine can reduce the symptoms of osteoarthritis, but is there any benefit in having both? The first study to address this issue has found that there is additional benefit, with 27% more study participants having a positive response when they took omega-3 fatty acids and glucosamine, when compared to those taking glucosamine alone. Researcher Dr Gruenwald and his co-workers said that the two products probably acted synergistically. "Omega-3 fatty acids inhibit the inflammation process in osteoarthritis, whereas glucosamine further supports the rebuilding of lost cartilage substance," they stated.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12325-009-0060-3>



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